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# The PALIMPSEST

AUGUST 1934

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THE EDITOR

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### THE PURPOSE OF THIS MAGAZINE

THE PALIMPSEST, issued monthly by the State Historical Society of Iowa, is devoted to the dissemination of Iowa History. Supplementing the other publications of this Society, it aims to present the materials of Iowa History in a form that is attractive and a style that is popular in the best sense—to the end that the story of our Commonwealth may be more widely read and cherished.

BENJ. F. SHAMBAUGH

*Superintendent*

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### THE MEANING OF PALIMPSESTS

In early times palimpsests were parchments or other materials from which one or more writings had been erased to give room for later records. But the erasures were not always complete; and so it became the fascinating task of scholars not only to translate the later records but also to reconstruct the original writings by deciphering the dim fragments of letters partly erased and partly covered by subsequent texts.

The history of Iowa may be likened to a palimpsest which holds the records of successive generations. To decipher these records of the past, reconstruct them, and tell the stories which they contain is the task of those who write history.

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# THE PALIMPSEST

EDITED BY JOHN ELY BRIGGS

VOL. XV

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NO. 8

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## Historic Iowa

Visitors in Boston, it is said, need to be told what to see and how to find it. They may wish to visit Bunker Hill Monument, the Boston Common, and the homes of Paul Revere, Oliver Wendell Holmes, and William H. Prescott. They may wish to see Faneuil Hall and Old North Church. But how to find them in the labyrinth of winding streets and tangled byways!

In Iowa it is quite otherwise. Here the thoroughfares are straight and smooth and long, stretching like waving ribbons across the great "Mesopotamia of the New World" from the Mississippi on the east to the Missouri on the west. Dotted along the highways and byways that project from these main thoroughfares are historic monuments and parks and churches and homes, comparable to those of New England and more readily accessible. If they are less renowned it is because of their proximity to us both in time and



distance. Remove them from us a few days' journey, wrap about them the lore of a century, cover them with ivy and moss, and interest in them will be increased many fold. New England has a rich historical background, but Iowa's historic sites are not without interest and beauty.

Bunker Hill Monument was erected in honor of those who went forth at the sound of the bugle, and fell in the heat of a great battle. But in Iowa there is a monument erected in honor of those who went forth in pursuit of friendly relations and for the advancement of peace. Floyd's Monument on the banks of the Missouri, in Woodbury County, marks a lonely grave. It is dedicated to members of the Lewis and Clark Expedition and especially to one of that party — Sergeant Charles Floyd — who fell in the westward march of 1804, and was perhaps the first white man buried in the Iowa country.

The original monument was a solitary cedar post which stood for many years to tell the tale of grief — "grief that was keenly felt and tenderly, but long since softened in the march of time and lost." Almost a century passed. Then, in 1901, contributions of a grateful people made possible the supplanting of the cedar post, and the erection of a sandstone shaft which towers a hundred feet above the mound. The scene is at once historic



and beautiful — a lofty hill, a place “where Heaven sheds its purest light and lends its richest tint.”

Sergeant Floyd will long be remembered as having served faithfully and well in that historic expedition of more than a hundred years ago. In the years to come, when his monument shall have become weathered and worn, his resting place will doubtless be recognized as one of the significant historic spots of Iowa.

But in Iowa there are also monuments dedicated to those who fell in the struggles of war. Standing tall and stately on the summit of capitol hill in the city of Des Moines is a granite shaft erected in honor of the 84,000 Iowa soldiers and sailors who served in the Civil War, and especially to the 15,000 who lost their lives in that great conflict. The base of the monument is sixty feet square and its height is more than one hundred and thirty feet. At the summit a wingless goddess of victory waves branches of palms signifying victory and peace. The monument was designed by an Iowa woman — Mrs. Harriet A. Ketcham of Mount Pleasant — and was erected at a cost of \$150,000. It was dedicated in 1894, James Harlan being the principal speaker at the dedicatorial program.

Historic sites have frequently been dedicated as



historical or memorial parks. This custom has not been confined to any one age or one area. It prevails in Iowa as it does in New England. In 1840 the Winnebago Indians came from Wisconsin into Iowa. They were accompanied across the border by Brigadier-General Henry Atkinson, and a fort which was established in Winneshiek County was appropriately named Fort Atkinson.

Four long rectangular barracks were erected. Provision was also made for a hospital, a chapel and schoolroom, a storehouse, a powder house, a guard-house, and two blockhouses. A picket fence twelve feet high made of substantial logs enclosed the buildings and a parade ground of more than an acre. At the end of the parade ground stood a tall flagstaff.

For a half dozen years troops were maintained there. Finally the Winnebagoes moved on into Minnesota and the fort was no longer needed. Accordingly, one morning in February, 1849, the troops were moved to other quarters and the old fort was abandoned. Attempts were then made to have the federal government give the fort and two sections of land for the site of an agricultural school which should be a branch of the State University. This request was denied, however, and the buildings were sold at public auction.

Half a century later the scene at the old fort



had greatly changed. Evidences of waste and decay were apparent. The buildings which had once been occupied by men of military poise and dignity now sheltered only the beasts and the birds. But there was something about the old fort which the ravages of time could not efface. A sentiment, akin to pride, clustered around the scenes of those early years. The weatherbeaten appearance of the old barracks might detract from their aesthetic value, but the historical significance of the place became more clearly apparent with each succeeding year. Iowa would not permit this historic shrine to be completely destroyed. In 1921 the site of the old fort was purchased and made into a State Park. There now on a summer day a visitor may enjoy a pleasant outing and read the history of the past as it is indelibly written in the walls of the old barracks. The powder house, too, still stands to tell its story of adventure, while the old well and the well curb are unique historical landmarks.

During the period of the Civil War another Iowa fort was erected, the site of which like that of Fort Atkinson has now become a State Park. The Sioux Indians under the leadership of Little Crow had become hostile in Minnesota and the Northwest. Fearing that depredations might be committed in Iowa, Governor Samuel J. Kirkwood



authorized the raising of troops and the erection of a fort at Estherville. Logs of black walnut and oak were used in the construction of substantial fortifications. The buildings were surrounded on three sides by an eight-foot plank wall four inches thick, the top of which was well studded with heavy spikes. The south wall was constructed of sod, eight feet high and very thick at the base. Within the fortifications a well was dug and walled to the top so securely that in later years, when time had wrought destruction to all else, the old well remained to furnish water fresh and cool for visitors at the site of the old fort.

In 1920, many years after the wooden defenses had vanished, the site of this frontier post was reclaimed and dedicated as an historic landmark and State Park.

Visitors in New England want to see Faneuil Hall and Old North Church. But Iowa, too, has its "Cradle of Liberty" and its famous old church. The Old Stone Capitol was the seat of government of the Territory of Iowa from 1842 until 1846 and the capitol of the State until 1857. It was the scene of three constitutional conventions — the place where our present State constitution was framed. There for a decade and a half Governors, Legislators, and Supreme Court Judges transacted official business. As a majestic and



interesting building of other years it is an historic landmark. As the administration building of the State University it continues to represent the best interests of the Commonwealth, and bids fair to become the center of much history that is still in the making.

At the almost deserted village of Bradford, near Nashua, in Chickasaw County, stands the Little Brown Church. No lanterns have been hung in its belfry tower to convey belligerent messages, but the song which has made it famous has been sung in many lands and has carried a message of peacefulness around the world.

There's a church in the valley by the wildwood,  
No lovelier spot in the dale.  
No spot is so dear to my childhood,  
As the little brown church in the vale.

And what shall we say of the homes of prominent Iowans — homes like those in New England that have become historic? Iowa, too, has had dexterous horsemen and men of renown in the field of letters.

Near the town of Le Claire in Scott County was the boyhood home of William F. Cody. At the age of eight Cody moved with his parents to Kansas. There a few years later, engaged as a buffalo hunter, he won the sobriquet of "Buffalo Bill". Going upon the stage in Chicago in the play



*Scouts of the Plains* and in New York in *Lost and Won*, he displayed his skill as an Indian fighter.

Believing, however, that it was not "fine acting" but the appearance of real Indians, guides, scouts, cowboys, buffaloes, and bucking broncos that the people wanted to see, Cody spent his last dollar to assemble a group of these for a show at the fairgrounds in Omaha in 1883. The show was a phenomenal success. From Omaha he went to Chicago, and from there to Madison Square Garden in New York. The following year he took his Indians and Wild West show to London, where he played before vast crowds and where upon invitation he appeared at Windsor Castle for the entertainment and edification of Queen Victoria, herself.

Meanwhile Cody's little old boyhood home in Iowa was becoming weatherbeaten and worn. Finally the house was advertised for sale. Shrewd purchasers bought it and removed it to Cody Memorial Park at Cody, Wyoming. At the little town of Le Claire, however, a monument has been erected in honor of this Iowa youth who became one of the world's greatest showmen.

The boyhood home of Emerson Hough may still be seen at Newton. Though the author of some of the best pioneer stories, including *The Mississippi Bubble*, *The Way to the West*, and *The Covered*



*Wagon*, spent most of his life elsewhere, he always counted himself a native of Iowa.

Hamlin Garland, too, was once an Iowan, living near the town of Osage. That was many years ago but he still recalls those early days.

Often now,  
When seated at my writing,  
I lay my pencil down  
And fall to dreaming, still,  
Of the stern, hard days  
Of the old-time Iowa seeding,  
When the prairie chickens woke me  
With their chorus on the hill.

The Harlan Home at Mount Pleasant recalls a relationship with the family of Abraham Lincoln. In the decade of the fifties James Harlan, President of Mount Pleasant Collegiate Institute, was elected to the United States Senate. Subsequently he was Secretary of the Interior in the cabinet of President Lincoln, and the Lincolns and Harlans became close friends. In 1868 this intimacy blossomed into romance when Mary Harlan, daughter of the Senator, was married to Robert T. Lincoln, the only surviving son of the martyred President. In the years that followed, Mary Harlan Lincoln resided for a time at the Harlan Home in Mount Pleasant. On an old door that has been preserved at the famous home, marks are still visible indicating the names, ages,



and heights of three of the grandchildren of James Harlan and Abraham Lincoln.

We admire the New England poets and would travel far to visit their homes. But Iowans should remember that at the little town of Delhi, in Delaware County, a boulder and bronze tablet mark the former residence of J. L. McCreery, a pioneer who is credited with having written at least one poem which for beauty and grandeur is comparable to the works of the New England poets.

There is no death! the stars go down  
To rise upon some other shore,  
And bright in heaven's jewelled crown  
They shine for evermore.

There is no death! the leaves may fall,  
The flowers may fade and pass away —  
They only wait, through wintry hours,  
The warm, sweet breath of May.

Thus "Historic Iowa" is not an idle boast nor an apt expression of a poet's dream. Rather, it is an ever-present reality. Within the borders of Iowa are historic monuments and parks and churches and homes conveniently located and worthy of consideration. New England is renowned for its many points of historical value, but Iowa's historic sites are not without interest and value.

J. A. SWISHER



## The Webster City Lyceum

"Pursuant to a call of the citizens a meeting was held at the school house" on November 13, 1857, "for the purpose of organizing a lyceum" in Webster City. In the beautiful shaded penmanship of J. M. Jones, the records of the preliminary meeting of this early civic forum declare that E. H. Blair was chosen president for the evening, and the assembled citizens proceeded to adopt a constitution.

It is evident that there had been some preliminary planning as to the purposes and conduct of this society, for otherwise no constitution could have been ready for the consideration of this first assembly. Whether the lyceum was organized in emulation of the flourishing Philomathean Society or as a rival is not revealed in the minutes of Secretary Jones. At all events the constitution presented by E. H. Blair and H. B. Martin was unanimously adopted. "Convinced of the utility of associative effort for mutual improvement," according to the preamble, "of the advantages to be derived by free discussion, and such other exercises as may tend to develop the intellect, expand the mind, and enkindle the higher sentiments of



our nature", the signers constituted themselves an association and elected officers.

E. H. Blair was chosen president. It was his duty to preside at all meetings, enforce observance of the constitution, maintain order, and determine the winning side of regular debates "according to the weight of argument offered." The first vice presidency, a substitute office, fell to J. M. Jones. Cyrus Smith was made secretary with the duty of acting as treasurer in addition to keeping the records. To H. Hoover was assigned the position of editor. The term of all officers was four weeks.

One might be left to wonder why a lyceum needed an editor had not the careful Mr. Jones preserved several copies of "The Webster City Review". This journal, "Devoted to Literary Improvement and Moral Entertainment", was the repository for the literary efforts of lyceum members. Contributions were submitted to the editor who copied such as he deemed worthy in a book — all in dainty Spencerian longhand — and read them at "every alternate regular meeting". Authorship was kept secret and no "editing" was permissible. Most of the stuff was local burlesque.

From a perusal of the constitution it appears that the society was to meet at 6:30 P. M. on Friday of each week. The "initiator" fee was



twenty-five cents, and dues consisted of an advance monthly payment of ten cents per member.

The record of dues paid shows all members to have paid the twenty-five cents, but the monthly dimes seem to have been rather elusive. In the record of February 1, 1858, it was "announced by Mr. Blair, that on Friday evening, Feb. 5, an election of officers would take place, and in consequence of default in payment of their regular monthly dime, all the members were constitutionally ineligible to office of emolument or trust, and that an election would be illegal, unless the members 'shell out' ". Accordingly the old officers held over until the membership liquidated itself into constitutionality, even though it had to be done in many instances by means of "25 cents in paper", which is indeed an eloquent commentary upon the monetary situation of Iowa in 1858.

With wise expenditure, however, the society lived, and paid its bills. There is no record of rent due for the schoolhouse, but "paid for candles 35c" is a frequent item, and "coal, 1.00", "paper .10" (old fashioned fool's cap) are noticeable entries, while under the date of February 25, 1859, is the notation, "Cash received from former Treasurer, 50c, and 5/6 lbs. of candles". At least no electric light bill was left overdue!

The meetings were to be conducted according



to accepted parliamentary procedure, but in debate, no member was to be allowed more than fifteen minutes at a time, and no one was to speak twice, until all had had an opportunity to speak.

A most interesting page in the old records of the Webster City Lyceum is the one whose caption is "Members". The page is divided into two columns, each headed "Names", and first upon the list is the name of J. M. Jones, in whose mind, no doubt, had originated the idea of this uplifting movement. Then follows: A. S. Leonard, Cyrus Smith, Harris Hoover, H. B. Martin, Emery H. Blair, H. Rhodes, Herme C. Rolff, S. B. Rosencrans, Emery W. Gates, E. A. Howland, (Mrs.) Calista L. Willson, Walter C. Willson, G. Berkeley, A. N. Hathaway, J. S. Letts, (Mrs.) Abbie M. Holt, (Mrs.) C. Rosencrans, Clara I. Maxwell, Emetine Maxwell, W. H. Laughlin, George Refenstahl, T. Billings, Sumler Willson, E. F. Cross, Edwin E. Cheney, Marcia A. Cheney.

Apparently others joined later, for the last eleven names are in very different types of writing from the first list. They are: Josephus Harman, E. F. Cutting, William Pelton, J. R. Burgess, E. W. Letts, Julius H. G. Montzheimer, Thos. N. Skinner (the first Congregational minister in Webster City), Wm. Leonard, A. H. Bell, E. W. Littlefield, J. R. Armstrong.



The little one-room log schoolhouse was at that time the only public building in the town, and, in consequence, all religious, social, and political meetings were held there. The Lyceum was obliged on one occasion at least to give precedence to a church service. Upon "being informed that a religious meeting had been appointed on the same evening [January 29, 1858], the society adjourned to Monday evening."

It is of more than passing interest to find in the record that on the evening of January 15, 1858, the "house was called to order by the president, and Charles Aldrich was announced as lecturer for the evening. In response to the call, the speaker took the stand and delivered a very able and eloquent address on the Art of Printing. The address was highly beneficial and instructive to the society, and reflected great credit upon the author, and the society before whom it was delivered. A motion was made and carried that the address be published in the *Hamilton Freeman*".

Apparently this resolution was not construed to be mandatory, for Mr. Aldrich who was the editor and publisher of the *Hamilton Freeman*, filled the columns of his paper with other matter. Perhaps he wished to reserve his exposition of the art of printing for other occasions. An item a few weeks later indicates that he delivered the same



address to the Philomathean Society on February 23rd. Always active in the interests of culture and civic welfare, his coöperation with the literary societies was perfectly typical. As editor, soldier, and historian he earned an enviable reputation as a good citizen of Iowa.

But there were others who addressed the Webster City Lyceum. S. B. Rosencrans spoke on "Manifest Destiny" in February and E. F. Cross lectured on "Progression" in March. While local talent was most extensively used, able speakers from Fort Dodge and elsewhere were welcome.

But in addition to the formal addresses and the preparation of the improving and entertaining "Review" the club was much interested in debating. What did they argue about in 1858? Some of the topics cause a smile for their triteness, such as, "Resolved that woman has more influence over man than money has." The records show that women won that decision. But when they debated, "Resolved that women should participate in making the laws which concern their welfare" — oh no, the woman side did not win then. Much eloquence of a chivalric type was expended, however, lest the fair sex should be offended.

Reminiscent of the Mormon trek across Iowa more than a decade before, this little forum discussed the question of expelling that strange sect



from the United States. Not all of the subjects were so academic, however. "Resolved that Iowa should extend state aid to assist in building such railroads as are of general and not of mere local importance", debated December 3, 1858, was a vital question among the citizens of Webster City at that time. They were tremendously interested in the westward progress of the Dubuque and Pacific Railroad. Should additional land grants be made and should the towns along the route contribute subsidies, It had been a prominent topic in the previous session of the legislature. Another indication of the importance attached to this question is the fact that the debate was not finished at one meeting, but was carried over to the next session, when the Lyceum "participated in a long and protracted discussion". The final decision was given in favor of the affirmative.

Perhaps the most important question was the one debated on January 14, 1859: "Resolved that the legislature of an organized territory has full power to prohibit Slavery, within its limits." A few months previous to this debate, Abraham Lincoln had propounded this question, in a more subtle form, to Stephen A. Douglas at Freeport. The answer given by Douglas lost him the support of the solid South, and ultimately contributed to the election of Lincoln to the Presidency.



The Webster City Lyceum was doing a really great work in swinging public opinion toward the cause of saving the Union. The members were being prepared for the great struggle. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that many names on the debating list were changed to the army rolls early in the war. H. B. Martin was said to be the first man from Hamilton County to enlist. Granville Burkley and Josephus Hartman joined Company F of the Second Iowa Cavalry, which was organized in Webster City, and Harris Hoover joined Company G. Charles Aldrich left the town without a newspaper, in order to serve the United States. The moving spirit of the Webster City Lyceum, J. M. Jones, resigned his position as Clerk of Court to become a major. Returning to Webster City he was later a member of the State legislature, a capable merchant and financier in Webster City, and a citizen who delighted in seeing the whole community prosper. In the sunset of his life, he enjoyed visiting with the old friends of early days, and to his care and thoughtfulness in preserving these records, we owe the privilege of a bird's eye view of the Webster City Lyceum.

BESSIE L. LYON



## Come to Hamilton County

"Springfield, Vt., Dec. 21, 1857

"MR. EDITOR. — You are aware that I have for a long time past been *talking* of moving west, but never could get my mind up to the starting point till now. But the general upsetting of fondly cherished hopes during the late financial crisis has turned the attention of New England more strongly than ever towards the West; and we with several of our friends are anxious to know what inducements your place and section of country presents to farmers, mechanics, merchants, &c., compared with Minnesota and Kansas. What are the chances of obtaining land at government price suitable for farms, for you know we must have *cheap land* these hard times.

"Are there any good openings near you for Merchants, Doctors and Lawyers? Any information you can give us on this subject will oblige

Your friend,

James R. Howe."

This inquiry was typical of the letters which Charles Aldrich, editor of the *Hamilton Freeman*, received "almost daily" in the fall of 1857. From



them he inferred that there would be a "heavy emigration next spring from the east." Come "straight to north-western Iowa," he advised Mr. Howe, where "cheap land" and any number of openings were available.

To a letter from John McDermott of Norristown, Pennsylvania, asking many questions, he published a reply in the *Freeman* on January 7, 1858. " 'The times' are considered very 'tight' in this section; but most business enterprises are proceeding with very little interruption. The winter has thus far been very mild and open — the roads in splendid condition — and out-door avocations have scarcely sustained a check. To see the life and industry that everywhere prevail, you would hardly suppose the times were considered 'hard.'

"There are no houses for rent here now. By writing to Messrs. Willson, town proprietors, we presume comfortable houses can be procured at short notice. They can build almost any kind of a domicil in about three weeks! Houses rent from \$60 to \$120 per year.

"There are two good saw-mills in town — and plenty of timber close at hand.

"In regard to the best time to come, we hardly know what to tell you. If the winter continues as genial as at present, the quicker the better. But at the farthest, come early enough in the Spring to



look about the country some before locating. The best and cheapest route for emigrants from your section, in our opinion, is — Railroad to Pittsburgh or Wheeling, and thence by steamboat to Davenport or Dubuque.

"There are no settlers in the sections named. The land in that vicinity is very fine.

"Next to money, about the best property a man of moderate means can bring with him, is a good horse team. He can either trade it for land, or find profitable employment with it.

"We believe North-Western Iowa to be one of the finest countries the sun shines upon. Scientific authority of the highest character backs us up in saying, that we have a soil not surpassed in fertility — a healthier climate than Western N. Y. or Pa. — a moderately fair supply of timber — any quantity of stone coal, building-stone, limestone, sand, common clays, fire-brick and potter's clays, iron, gypsum, &c., &c. Good farmers and mechanics cannot but prosper anywhere in this vicinity. In many of the surrounding towns there are good openings for professional men.

"Nestled down in one of the prettiest little nooks in creation — in the center of this rich and fertile region — is one of the smartest and widest-awake towns in the West — called Webster City."



That prospective settlers might have a clearer conception of the location, character, and business opportunities of the Hamilton County seat of government, Mr. Aldrich reprinted some "Notes on Webster City" written on December 15, 1857, by the travelling correspondent of the Dubuque *Express and Herald*. Of course the outspokenly Republican *Freeman* was not mentioned among the resources of Webster City, but what could be expected of a sheet so blindly partisan as the Dubuque paper!

"Nearly a year has rolled around since I visited this beautifully situated and thriving town, a description of which I gave to your readers then, and now business has enabled me to spend a few days with its hospitable and enterprising people. No one can become acquainted with the inhabitants of Webster City and not be pleased with them and the town. Education, refinement and morality are the distinguishing features of society, and the great object of the citizens seems to be to advance, not alone in wealth, but also in those attainments, mental and intellectual, that elevate the human mind, and enable man to enjoy life as designed by the Great Creator.

"Consequently, we see here no bickerings or jealousies among neighbors, but an universal desire to help each other forward in their struggles



in a new country. Such a community is naturally strong, and bound to prosper, and to keep gathering in more of the same material continually.

"Although the monetary crisis and panic have thrown their blighting mildew more or less upon all the new towns of the West, and have materially retarded their growth, yet Webster City has progressed, and is still progressing with a rapid and substantial increase, a sure sign these times that it is bound to become an important and commanding point.

"Over forty good buildings have been erected, and are in course of construction this season. Extensive preparations are making for building during the coming spring, and the buildings which are then to be put up are to be first class, either brick or stone. A handsome and durable bridge is now being thrown across the Boone river near the center of town, north and south, which connects the town with a beautiful addition on the east side recently laid out by Messrs. Grechenek and de Zeyk, Land Agents, Civil Engineers and Surveyors, of Webster City. These gentlemen are Hungarians, and were with Kossuth during the memorable struggle of Hungary for freedom. They purchased largely in this place, and have done much by their activity and enterprise for the advancement of its interests.



"A large, handsome and elegantly designed Town Hall, the plans for which were drawn up by the above firm, is now in course of erection, to be built by the Webster City Building Association, at a cost of about seven thousand dollars. The building will be two stories high. In the first story, three large and handsome store rooms will be fitted up. The Hall will be above these, and will be sixty feet deep by thirty wide, and will be fitted and furnished in the best modern style for public meetings, concerts, balls, parties, &c.

"Webster City is considered as one of the most promising towns on the line of the Dubuque and Pacific Rail Road, and justly so, I think. With a commanding and central position in the rich agricultural valley of the Boone river, and with no competition from rival towns to impede its growth, it has everything in its favor to push it forward. The farming interests have kept pace with the growth of the town, and both town and country are prospering. An excellent and energetic class of farmers are fast making their fine farming lands equal to any in the state, and are now beginning to put up excellent farm buildings and improvements.

"A new and good stage road has been opened recently by the citizens of Webster City and Alden, by which the distance between the two places, or between the Iowa and Boone rivers is



shortened some eight miles. This road follows the proposed line of the Dubuque and Pacific Rail Road.

"The present time, and the next spring, will be highly favorable times to settle here, and I now know of no point in the interior that offers superior advantages to new comers, to Webster City. The owners of property here are determined to sell to the right kind of men on the best terms. Sawed lumber can be had at very short notice, and buildings can be put up in quick order. Produce of all kinds is plenty, and can be had at reasonable rates, and merchandise is sold cheap in proportion, as the facilities for obtaining goods either from Dubuque or Iowa City are constantly improving. Rail Road facilities are fast approaching, and when our Dubuque and Pacific Road reaches even Independence, a trade will be poured in from this part of the West, that will be an agreeable surprise to Dubuque. Most of the trade now goes to Iowa City. Trade is done here mostly on a cash basis, and consequently there have been no failures as yet. Dubuque should seek after the business of this section of country.

"The Messrs. Willson, and other town proprietors are all in excellent spirits, and the motto of all the citizens seems to be Progress and Improvement. The Willson House, kept by D. A. Under-



down, Esq., is a large and excellent Hotel, and is well patronized.

"I am desired by the citizens to say that a good Jeweler and Watch Maker is needed here badly, and a liberal patronage will be insured to one who will settle here. At present all the work has to be sent to Fort Dodge. It is an excellent opening."

Inasmuch as "nine-tenths of our papers eventually find their way east," Mr. Aldrich believed that the publication of specific and accurate information about the locality was the best way of attracting settlers. Accordingly, on February 25, 1858, he printed "A Brief Description of Webster City and the County of Hamilton, State of Iowa".

"HAMILTON COUNTY is what was formerly known as Risley County. It was afterwards united to Yell, thus forming Webster County; and, during the session of 1856 and '57, it was again divided, forming Webster and Hamilton Counties.

"Hamilton County is 24 miles square, containing 368,640 acres of land, of which 271,940 have been sold; leaving 96,700 unsold, which is now subject to pre-emption and entry.

"The first sales of land in this County were made in the year 1852; but the first immigration of any importance was during the summer of 1855.



The County now contains about 2,500 inhabitants, and property valued at \$1,400,000, according to the Assessment of May 1st, 1857.

"The County is well watered by the Boone, Skunk and White Fox Rivers, the banks of which are skirted with belts of timber of excellent quality, varying from one-fourth to three miles in width. The Boone runs through the western portion of the County, from North to South; and the Skunk through the eastern portion, in the same direction. All of these streams are supplied with Limestone of excellent quality, and Bituminous Coal is found in abundance cropping out along the banks of the Boone.

"The Prairie is well watered by small streams and spring ponds, and is unsurpassed by any in this or any other State for fertility of soil. Water of superior quality is found by digging from 8 to 30 feet.

"In regard to the unsurpassed fertility of our soil, there can be no question. D. D. Owen, U. S. Geologist, made a thorough scientific exploration of this region, some years ago, the results of which were published under authority of Congress. After stating the constituents of our soil, he says this identical region is 'the most fertile upland plain in America.' His work may be found in almost every public library, and consulted by any



desiring further information. This is scientific evidence of the highest character, and it cannot be disputed.

"The County contains four Towns, viz: Webster City, Homer, Marion City and Hawley. Homer was the County Seat of old Webster County, but in the division of the County, the County Seat was located at Webster City by an act of the Legislature.

"Webster City was laid out in July, 1855, and it now contains between 80 and 100 buildings, and at the present time the total valuation of personal property and town lots amounts to \$150,000. The town now contains between four and five hundred inhabitants; three Hotels, two Mills, one Printing Office (*Hamilton Freeman*) six Stores, one Blacksmith shop, one Wagon Shop, one Livery Stable, two Law Offices, four land Offices, four Physicians, &c. A fine Bridge costing \$3000 spans the Boone River at this place.

"The route of the Dubuque & Pacific Railroad crosses the County from east to west, through Hawley and Webster City. Webster City being the central point between the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers, it is supposed that the central or principal division of the Road will be located here.

"There being no competing town within twenty miles either east or west, and commanding the en-



tire trade of the Boone Valley from its source to its mouth — a distance of some 50 miles of well-timbered country — render the future of Webster City as promising as that of any inland town in the State. The liberal policy of the proprietors of the town gives life, energy and enterprise to every new undertaking.

“Hamilton County wants *good* Farmers. There is no county in this State where Farmers have finer prospects or choicer lands for raising stock than our own.

“Webster City wants a Grist Mill, a Tin Shop, a Wagon and Plow Manufactory, a Harness Maker, one or two Brick Makers, and a first-rate Jeweler; and, in fact, we need all kinds of mechanics. A great number of buildings will be erected the coming summer, and mechanics will find plenty of work and good pay.

“Our town lies in the direct line of the proposed Keokuk and St. Peters R. R.; and we feel assured that it cannot miss us, not only because of our being in the direct line, but from the face of the country through which it must pass.

“All the lands lying within the R. R. grant will be brought into market on the 21st of June, at \$2.50 per acre, besides 140,000 acres of new land in this District.

“We have a daily mail east and west, from



Dubuque to Sioux City; and a weekly mail north and south.

"Our inhabitants are all of an intelligent and enterprising class. We have good schools and good society.

"All persons who are looking for a home in the West, will find this a perfectly healthy location. We need *no* Physicians — those now here are not earning their bread at their profession."

Apparently these enthusiastic descriptions of the "advantages, prospects and wants" of the Webster City region made a favorable impression for on March 4th the *Freeman* reported: "There is more travel over the road through this section than there has been for many months previous. It really seems a little like old times."



## Comment by the Editor

### *THE TIDE TURNS*

From early morning until night, day after day, the roads were crowded with the endless caravan of settlers going farther west. The rumble and creaking of heavy wagons, the sharp crack of whips, the ceaseless thud of horses' hoofs, and occasionally the slower, softer tread of oxen mingled with the sound of human voices to constitute the symphony of the great migration. Old pioneers of the thirties and forties listened and marvelled. Through the timbered valleys, past flourishing towns and settled communities, out upon the open sea of grass sailed the argosies on wheels. These were the prairie farmers.

It was in the middle fifties that the tide of immigration to Iowa reached the flood stage. Hundreds of home seekers crossed the Mississippi every day and moved on to the interior. Four million acres of land were transferred to settlers in a single year. Prices soared, and still they came — shrewd New Englanders, thrifty agriculturists from the shallow-soiled fields of New York and Pennsylvania, veteran pioneers who had hewed their way through the forests of Ohio and Indiana, young men on the second or third move



of the family migration across the continent, and, among these natives, thousands of German, Irish, British, and Scandinavian immigrants.

Railroads were built across Illinois and on into Iowa. Towns were planned and lots were bought in anticipation of a metropolitan future. Opportunity seemed to be bounded only by the limits of hope and imagination.

And then came the "financial revulsion" of 1857. The exotic blossom of unlimited prosperity, nourished too much by speculation, suddenly withered. Production had outrun consumption. Credit tightened and the top-heavy load of debt began to topple. Vague doubt developed into general fear. A life insurance company suspended operations; merchants failed; four railroads went into bankruptcy; and the strain plunged most of the banks into the same abyss.

Emigration to Iowa was checked by business disaster. The movement which had increased the population of Hamilton and the six adjoining counties more than seven and a half times between 1852 and 1856 added less than five thousand inhabitants to that area during the next three years. News of the Spirit Lake Massacre and the crop failure in 1858 may have deterred some prospective settlers, but the principal reason why Iowa land lost its appeal was the blight of depression.

J. E. B.



# THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA

Established by the Pioneers in 1857  
Located at Iowa City Iowa

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